The Dead Soldier's Afterglow

By HELVIN BRAYTON

The national guard were fighting a sham battle. The red were attacking the enemy's country, while the blue were defending it. Lieutenant Ned Wagstaff was standing behind the line of battle, the men, at parade rest, waiting orders. A staff officer rode up and said:

"This command has been annihilated."

The colonel turned to his men and told them that, having been annihilated, they could fight no more. Then he gave the order to stack arms and permission to do as they liked till retreat.

"Billy," said Wagstaff to Captain Drummond, "I want you to do something for me."

"What is it?"

"Go up to the house and tell Belle Harkaway that our regiment has been annihilated, that I've been killed and the jig's up all around."

"What for?"

"I want to see how she'll take it."

"She is certainly not so silly as to take it literally."

"She's pretty stupid."

"Stupid girls are most attractive to men—that is, if they are pretty—and Belle is very pretty—decidedly pretty."

"If you play your part well you can fool her. I'm curious to know if she'll mourn for me."

"All right; I'll try it on. Suppose she wants to see your dead body."

"I never thought of that. Perhaps I'd better lie dead on the battlefield. You can bring her to see the corpse. But first I want to know if you're going to give me away."

"No; I won't do that, though it would be a good joke to do so. I'll play the part for you as well as I can."

"And you'll tell me how she takes it?"

"No, but if she wants to see your corpse you can judge for yourself about that."

"All right. You'll find me under that big oak over there. So long."

Billy departed for the house, and Wagstaff went over to the oak, sprawled himself on the grass and, to kill time while waiting to be inspected for a dead man, lit a cigar. Men who fight sham battles need to get up a lot of Dutch courage. Ned had distinguished himself for bravery induced by several bracers during the fight; consequently he felt dopey and soon yielded to slumber. Suddenly he was awakened by a girl's voice:

"Where is he? Oh, tell me, where is he?"

Ned, recognizing the voice of the girl he loved and, realizing that soldiers are not usually killed with cigars in their mouths, let the half smoked weed fall. He felt it roll down his cheek, but where it landed he couldn't see. He lay stiff and stark.

"Here he is!" he heard Drummond say.

Ned looked sidewise between his lashes and saw Belle Harkaway hurrying toward him. He closed his eyes and lay with a peaceful expression on his face. Indeed, he put on a certain serenity which he had often practiced before a mirror and which he considered very becoming to him. Belle knelt beside him. He dared not open his eyes, but he knew she was there and very near him.

"Oh, Ned!" she moaned.

"He died a noble death," Billy put in solemnly.

"Dear, brave Ned! If I had only not treated you as I did. If you could but speak one word to me to tell me that you forgive me. Are you sure he is dead? There's color in his face."

"Oh, that's often the case with men shot in battle. They call it the soldier's afterglow."

This was very clever of Billy, seeing that the afterglow was produced by the bracers Ned had taken during the fight.

"Ned," moaned Belle, "speak to me!"

Ned didn't dare part his lips sufficiently to look at her, but he could hear her moaning over him.

"He makes a beautiful corpse," Billy remarked.

"Lovely! He must have been smoking when he was shot."

"What makes you think that?" asked Billy.

"Don't you see the cigar on his shoulder? Dear, brave Ned—coolly smoking in the face of danger."

"That was just like him," said Billy. "He was always doing that kind of thing. He cared nothing for danger."

"What were his last words?" asked Belle. "Did he say anything about me?"

"Yes. He said, 'Tell Belle Harkaway that my last thoughts, my last words, were of her.'"

"Oh, dear! If I could have been here to hold him in my arms when he died. Somehow I can't realize that the red color you call the soldier's afterglow isn't the blood of life. I'm going to pinch his cheek. It may bring him back to us."

She gave his cheek a terrific pinch. Ned winced, but stood the test.

"See!" cried Belle. "The afterglow—a lot of it!"

She pinched him again, this time so vigorously that he howled.

Opening his eyes, he looked into two of the merriest orbs that ever gazed on the corpse of a beloved object.

"Rats!" he said. "There's no use trying to be dead under a pinch like that."

"More afterglow!" she cried, clapping her hands with delight as a blush of shame covered his face.

A Sure Sign.

"See here, Mr Binks, the young man you sent to do that plumbing work at my house was a new and inexperienced hand."

"Why, sir, he is a very good and careful worker. What was wrong about his work?"

"I haven't examined his work at all."

"Then how do you know he was inexperienced?"

"Because he had all his tools with him when he came and never left the job until he had finished it."—Baltimore American.

THE STRONG WOMAN

By M. QUAD

During the first year of her existence the female who came to be known as "the stroug woman" was called Hetty Davis. That was her correct name. George Davis was a farmer, and both he and his wife were undersized people. The infant was a weakling, and the doctors frankly said that the first symptoms of measles would be the end of her.

At the age of eighteen months Hetty took a start in life and was soon known as "the big kid." She took on fat and simply played with mumps, measles and whooping cough. Her weight at two years was that of the average girl of ten. She grew from "the big kid" to "the big girl." At the age of sixteen they were calling her "the strong woman," and that title stuck to her.

The Davis farm was worth marrying, and there was money in the bank besides. There were young men and bachelors and widowers who were willing to marry it. They came courting and were laughed at, but at length the strong woman announced that on a certain day, if the swains would all gather at her farm, she would select a husband from among them. The gathering numbered thirty. As they sat around casting sheep's eyes at her she rose and said:

"Gentlemen, I want a man who can control me. The man who wins me must best me in a fair rough and tumble fight. There are no other conditions."

There were only five men out of the thirty who wanted matrimony that way. Out of the five there was a widower forty years old who could mow hay and hoe more corn than any other for ten miles round. He stepped out on the grass and peeled his coat and vest and spat on his hands. According to authentic reports, he was a licked man in five minutes. Not only that, but he carried a stiff neck for the rest of his life. The strong woman had almost twisted his head off, and none of the others came forward as No. 2.

The farm was run by hired men. Now and then for the first two years they got impudent at times or did not keep up to their work. They were knocked unconscious, thrown over the fence into the road or sent away with broken bones. It was a great highway for tramps, or had been. They came along in bunches. They stopped and demanded food. They even threatened things. When they got to threats the strong woman sailed in. She struck and slapped; she kicked and bit; she knocked their heads together until their ears rang for days afterward. Her greatest victory was over a bunch of five. After the news of that got abroad all tramps would go six miles around to dodge her farm. The strong woman paid no attention to science. She just waded right in any old way to win, and if she got her teeth fastened upon a man's ear it was bad for him.

The strong woman didn't pay much attention to other women. She knew they didn't like her and that they gossiped about her, but she continued to pass it by for years. Then a casual remark rolled her. A certain woman said that she was so homely that she couldn't catch a husband. No homely woman ever yet admitted that she was homely, nor was there ever an old maid ready to admit that she had tried and failed. The strong woman sent out notice that she had hit the trail for a husband. No one responded. On the contrary, men hid out in barns and haystacks and trembled in their shoes. Two weeks and no husband.

Then the strong woman bought a bear trap, covered the teeth with heavy cloth and set it at the open barn door. Three nights passed without a victim, but at midnight on the fourth night along came a horse thief, gayly, and was caught by the leg. His yells of pain aroused the woman, and she lighted the lantern and went out. After taking a good look at the prisoner she turned away with the remark:

"I guess you'll do. Stay right here till morning."

He begged and pleaded and yelled, but there he stayed for four hours more. Then came daylight and his captor, and she asked:

"Does it happen that you are a married man?"

"No."

"Then you soon will be. Listen to me. You'll be laid up for about a week. After that we shall we married, you and I."

"I marry you?" he asked after a long look at her.

"You will."

"I'll go to prison first!"

"You'll do nothing of the kind. Perhaps you've heard of me—the strong woman."

He uttered a groan of despair.

"They say I can't find a husband, but I'll show 'em!"

"But, woman, I'm a horse thief!"

"I don't care for that."

It is a fact that after a week they were married. It is a further fact that he ran away, and after a hunt of a month she brought him back and hammered him until he didn't get out of bed for three weeks. He settled down then and made a good husband, and the two lived happily together for twenty years, when the strong woman met a death befitting her name. A barn sixty feet long and thirty feet wide blew over on her, and she was gathered to her fathers. A walnut tree or a brick house couldn't have done it.

THE HIGHER LIFE.

The one prudence in life is concentration, the one evil is dissipation, and it makes no difference whether our dissipations are coarse or fine, property and its cares, friends and a social habit or politics or music or feasting. Everything is good which takes away one plaything and delusion more and drives us home to add one more stroke of faithful work.—Emerson.

THE PASSING OF MURDOCK

By AINSWORTH RHODES

"I have taken my life in my hands," said the western sheriff, "when there was every chance against me. I have shot down men in a fight or when I had them on the run, but the hardest job I ever had to do, the job against which my sensibilities most revolted, was in the killing of John Murdock, desperado. Murdock was far superior to the general run of outlaws. I don't know what made him such, but I always fancied he got started in by some unfortunate circumstance, such as killing some enemy illegally or being wrongfully accused. Be this as it may, he was physically a splendid specimen of a man, and I always thought that his distaste for the life he lived, to say nothing of his conscience, made him choose at last a speedy death in preference to prison walls. But the true cause he gave himself.

After a train robbery in Texas by a single masked man it was my duty to follow indications that he had left behind him and go in search of him. A man named Gilson told me that in passing through the chaparrals he had picked up articles to indicate that the robber had dropped them. There were pieces of corn letters and a gold chain. I felt sure from these finds that the robber after leaving the train had passed over this ground and that I could track him.

I started with Gilson, each of us being armed with a pair of revolvers and a Winchester. He took me to the place where he had picked up the chain and bits of letters, and we followed the trail. It consisted of bent grass through open ground and an occasional bit of paper dropped by the way. It seemed to me then and it seems strange now that the man should have been so careless. Gilson seemed to know instinctively the direction taken by the man we were following and led the way. He simply agreed to pilot me and forewarned me that he would do no shooting to kill unless it should be necessary in our defense. We traveled about six miles when we suddenly came upon a man with his back to us sorting out valuables. It was evident he was the man we were after. We had proceeded so silently that we had made no sound to indicate our approach. We got within easy shooting distance of him when we stopped, and I, drawing a bead on him with my Winchester, shouted:

"Hands up!"

The man turned, rose and stood erect before us. He did not throw up his hands, but folded his arms. While turning he had seized a revolver in each hand, and they were now pointed in opposite directions, sidewise. He was six feet high and admirably proportioned. He looked me in the eye and said:

"I don't wish to add murder to my other crimes. They are many enough and black enough without my increasing them. They began by my being mistaken for another man, and they are to end on account of a letter recently received from my mother, who doesn't know what kind of a life I have been leading. If I die now she may never know. If I am jailed for a term of years she will likely know, and if I kill one of you men it will do me no good. I am not to be taken alive; therefore I would prefer that you should shoot me down here as I stand. Only I ask you to finish me with one shot. I am known as John Murdock. That's not my name, but my real name no man in the state knows. I'm ready. Fire at either my heart or my forehead and aim true."

As I stood there looking at this splendid specimen of a man calling on me to shoot him that his mother might not know what he was I realized more fully than ever before that man is a superior animal only in heredity and influence. This man who had been contemptible enough to rob defenseless men and women could stand up to be killed that he might save his mother the distress of knowing that the child she had borne and reared was a robber. Whatever of influence for good he had received as a child was telling now in trumpet tones. Had luck not been against him doubtless this influence would have been sufficient to make a fine man of him.

"You had better surrender," I said to him. "At any rate, I wish you would. I'm a sheriff, but I don't like the role of executioner."

"No. I have made my peace. Several times since I was wrongfully made a felon I have exposed myself that my career would be finished by a bullet. I have no desire to live. I can't undo the past. I can't live a respectable life. I can't be a comfort to those who have loved me. You will be doing me a favor to kill me. But don't let your sympathies cause you to bungle. You know how to shoot straight. Put your bullet where it will do the job at once."

I wished I could turn the work over to Gilson. But it was my duty, not his. It must be done, and in mercy to the man I was to kill it should be done at once. He was nerved to meet his fate, and he would not wish to be unnerved by delay. Then I summoned my own nerve and did the job as a surgeon plunges a knife into a patient—swift and sure.

That was the last official act of mine as sheriff. I sickened of the duties and handed in my resignation with my report of this killing.

Notice of Application for Tax Deed.

Notice is hereby given that Marshall Morse, purchasers of tax certificate No. 151, dated the 4th day of November, A.D. 1905, has filed said certificate in my office, and has made application for tax deed to issue in accordance with law. Said certificate embraces the following described property situated in Putnam county, Florida, to-wit: SW¼ of SW¼, section 7, township 9 s., range 26 e.: 40 acres.

The said land being assessed at the date of the issuance of such certificate in the name of L. O. Garrett. Unless said certificate shall be redeemed according to law, tax deed will issue thereon on the 11th day of July, A. D. 1910.

Witness my official signature and seal this the 10th day of June, A. D. 1910.

[Seal] HENRY HUTCHINSON,
Clerk Circuit Court Putnam Co., Fla.
By Henry Hutchinson, Jr., D. C.

Notice of Intention to Apply to Board of Pardons for Commutation of Sentence.

Notice is hereby given that on Thursday, July, 7, 1910, or as soon thereafter as my application can be heard, I shall apply to the Board of Pardons at Tallahassee, Florida, for a commutation of my sentence of death to life imprisonment. I was convicted of murder in the first degree, at the April term, 1910, of the Circuit Court of Putnam County Florida, and sentenced to be hanged. LAWRENCE DARGAN.

This June 28, A. D. 1910.